

Bristow residents due briefing on Superfund site

By CASEY SMITH World Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, January 30, 2014 12:00 am

Members of Bristow First Assembly's congregation never meant their new coffee bar to see the inside of the city's Overtime Pub.

But last summer when church members learned the severity of environmental problems emerging under and around their church located on the street once called Old Refinery Road, they realized their community needed a different space to worship. Taking over the recently closed bar in downtown Bristow located in a historic brick building that some say once housed a brothel on the top floor seemed like a fine choice.

"We really wanted to step out and do something for our community," said Mark Evans, Bristow First Assembly's pastor. "Instead of it being a bar that dispenses alcohol, it could be a building that dispenses God's grace."

Bristow First Assembly's now-shuttered church and six houses are located on the roughly 125 acres just northeast of Bristow that the Environmental Protection Agency added to its Superfund program in December. Currently there are seven active Superfund sites in Oklahoma.

Two oil refineries once operated on the property that an EPA report says contains contaminated soil, cooling ponds and numerous tank bottoms. Hazardous substances found on the site include lead and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

The federal Superfund program designates hazardous waste sites and oversees their cleanup. Thursday evening, the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality will host an open house at the Bristow Library to answer questions and explain the Superfund process.

"Our goal throughout the process is to keep the community informed," said Skylar McElhaney, spokeswoman for DEQ.

The Superfund site consists of land used by two refineries from 1915 to 1965. Wilcox Oil Co. operated as a crude oil refinery from the 1920s until 1963 and during that time expanded by acquiring the adjacent Lorraine Refinery.

The next step in the lengthy Superfund process will be to determine the extent of contamination. Officials will make a cleanup plan once the contamination and potential risks to people and the



9516205

environment have been evaluated.

To fund cleanup of such sites, the federal government attempts to locate parties responsible for contamination or pays for the cleanup itself.

Contaminants found on site so far are associated with health effects in cases of long-term high exposure, said Jennah Durant, EPA Region 6 spokeswoman.

"We don't see any concerns for immediate health effects, but that being said, we're talking about families who live in this area and obviously they are spending most of their time there," Durant said.

"Our goal during the cleanup process will be (to keep) in close contact with the community and advise them of any precautions they need to take."

Contamination found so far has been mainly in the soil and ponds used for industrial processes, she said.

Lead can cause developmental problems, and the health effects of PAHs have caused tumors and reproductive issues in animals but are not as well known in humans, she said.

"Well testing showed levels of metals above expected measurements, but the readings were well below maximum contaminant levels for drinking water," Durant said.

Evans said Bristow First Assembly's church and parish house have been connected to the city's water system since 1994 and 2000, respectively. But both used the same pipes that carried water from an old private well that once serviced the buildings, he said.

The well is now filled with refinery waste.

Evans said he realized he needed to move his family and congregation away from the property following conversations with environmental officials and incidents where his children came into contact with oil waste and contaminated soil while playing outside.

"As a pastor, I didn't want my congregation to be exposed to that. There are so many unknowns about the site."

The Bristow First Assembly's congregation has been worshipping in another local church since holding the final service in its building in August.

The congregation has nearly finished restoring 2,500 square feet of the recently closed Overtime Pub and plans to start Wednesday night youth group services next month in the rented property, renamed Brickstreet.

Brickstreet is not large enough to house Sunday services for the congregation of around 200, but members are excited about having their own space again for church meetings, Evans said.

Eventually the church hopes to turn Brickstreet into a soup kitchen, coffee bar or some other type of community outreach facility.

Money is still a problem for the congregation. When the land on which the church and parish house sit was named a Superfund site, the insurance company canceled Bristow First Assembly's liability and contents policies, Evans said.

The contamination has meant the church has nothing to borrow against to buy Brickstreet and property upstairs that members also restored.

Last year after discovering mold from water damage and a troubling amount of rat feces in the church building, congregation members raised money for \$80,000 worth of renovations to a building they may never be able to worship in again.

"It has been a tragedy, but I choose to look at it like God's got the best in store for us and God's going to turn it around," Evans said. "It's not a crisis; he's in control."

World Staff Writer Curtis Killman contributed to this story.

Casey Smith 918-732-8106

casey.smith@tulsaworld.com

Superfund open house, Q&A

Hosted by: The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality

Time: 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Date: Thursday

Place: Bristow Library, 111 W. Seventh Ave., Bristow

Learn more

Read about the Bristow-area Superfund site from the EPA and DEQ at bit.ly/EPAwilcox and bit.ly/DEQwilcox.